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ABSTRACT

People fail to communicate because they fail to read accurately the cultural signs that each person is sending. This consistently produces bewilderment, and often feelings of anger, frustration, and pain. Communication becomes virtually impossible when people not only operate from different cultural codes, but are unaware that different codes are in operation. White middle class and black American culture are different. Invariably, it has been the minority or subordinate cultural groups in society which suffer when communication fails. Biculturalism is the solution for a better society. (Author/DM)

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CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION:
CONTRASTING PERSPECTIVES, CONFLICTING SENSIBILITIES

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PART I

Communication Failure: An Analysis

Scene 1. In an urban classroom an Anglo teacher is reproaching a Puerto Rican child. Part of his response includes the lowering of his eyes. The teacher moves toward the child, lifts his chin, and, even more harshly than before, scolds, "You look me in the eye when I'm talking to you!" The child is hurt and bewildered. Rapport between this student and teacher is irreparably damanged.

Scene 2. In another inner-city classroom on the high school level a stylishly dressed Black male student assumes a "familiar" attitude toward the young inexperienced, white, female teacher. He remarks about her personal appearance, how "fine" she looks. She regards his remarks and posture as impertinent, even insulting. Typically, she reacts as follows: she either becomes flustered and helpless and "pleads" with the student to "behave," "return to his seat," etc., or, either alternatively or additionally, she decides to "assert her authority," which entails behaving in a manner which is designed to get him to respect the difference between her status and his. She is, after all, a "teacher," and what is he?

Scene 3. An investigation of a typical clash between Puerto Ricans and police reveals among other things, the following: a Puerto Rican man indicated that he only wanted to get close enough to the Anglo policeman "to say something." The policeman regarded the Puerto Rican man's proximity as "threatening" and responded as though he were being attacked.

Scene 4. A father tells his children that he will "take them to the circus on Saturday," only to later find that the tickets have all been sold. He tells his children that they won't be able to go. The children complain bitterly. "But you promised," they say. Defensively, the father replies, "How did I know there weren't going to be any more tickets left?"

Scene 5. Weston LaBarre reported in 1947 that "The notorious Massey murder in Hawaii arose from the fact that a native beach boy perhaps understandably mistook the Occidental "flirting" of a white woman for a bona fide sexual invitation." He also reported that "there are known cases which have ended in the death of American ethnographers who misread the cultural signs while in the field."

The number of examples given here can be multiplied a thousandfold. People fail to communicate all the time. Yet the above examples are selectively significant because in each, there involves a failure to properly understand the message because the communicants involved failed to understand each other's code: to read accurately, the cultural signs that the other was sending. While this produced respectively, feelings of anger, frustration and pain, it produced consistently: bewilderment.

Communication is difficult even among people who share the same cultural code. Because of the ever-present possibility of being confronted with an unfamiliar cultural sign it is even more difficult among people who operate from different codes, are aware that the codes are different and who generally understand how these differences affect inter-cultural communication.

However, communication becomes virtually impossible among people who not only operate from different codes, and are unaware of how these differences may interfere with effective communication, but, even worse are often unaware that there are even different codes in operation. For how can we properly respond or influence the outcome of an event if we have not properly understood intent.

In fact, as Goffman has pointed out, the initial phase of communication is most significant, because it is this part which introduces a program which defines not only the initial thrust in which intent is signaled but the "cooperative activity that follows." (p. 12) As viewed within the framework of our cultural code, a man's invitation to a woman to "have a cup of coffee" initiates a plan which if uninterrupted, may proceed along a selective number of tracks each of which structures a possible variety of overtures and responses and leads to a select number of plateaus or resolutions, which may or may not include a "cup of coffee." To qualify as operating within the code the responses must fall within a range: <u>anticipated</u> to <u>conceivable</u>. Responses that cannot be interpreted as such within the code are considered bizarre. For example, a bizarre response to the above "coffee" invitation might be to "put on a bathing cap." A "slap in the face," on the other hand, may not be an "anticipated" response but may not fall outside the range of a "conceivable" response. It depends on how the victim interprets it. If he responds to himself, "It sure is hard to get to know that girl" he has interpreted her response as operative within the code. On the other hand, if he wonders whether she "heard" him properly, considering the harm-

lessness of his promotional remark, he has evaluated her response as implausible, as one that is outside of the range of conceivable responses and therefore outside of the code.

Cross-cultural interference occurs when communicants who operate from different codes, interpret the same behavior according to respectively different, and often conflicting, code perspectives. This was precisely what happened in each of the illustrations given above. The native beach boy in LaBarre's report interpreted the flirtatious manner of the Western white woman as being part of a program which in his culture invariably led to a sexual resolution, i.e., he viewed her behavior as if it were being manifested by a woman from his own culture. His considered response, which presumably incorporated some kind of sexual advance, would have been regarded by those sharing the same code perspective as well within the range of <u>anticipated</u> or <u>plausible</u>. However, his response, to the woman, was most likely regarded as <u>inconceivable</u> within the limitations imposed by the program she had initiated. No doubt her shocked reaction to the beach boy's response was as "inconceivable" to him as his sexual advance was to her.

There is another element which needs to be considered here before proceeding further and that is to take notice of Goffman's additional point that "any projected definition of the situation also has a distinctive moral character." (p. 13). Goffman essentially is viewing behavior as operative within the same cultural code and is concerned with an individual who, when he "makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, . . . automatically exerts a moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that persons of his kind have right

teacher "misread" the Puerto Rican child's lowering of the eyes which, in her code, has the effect of deflecting (and thereby mitigating) the force of the reproach. Since she regarded her reproach as appropriate to the offense she interpreted his response as an attempt to escape punishment. Her initial anger is intensified because now she is rebuking him for attempting to avoid punishment in addition to his original offense. By going over to him and lifting his chin, she intends to reestablish eye contact with him, which again, according to her code, would have the effect of re-intensifying the impact of her remarks as well as to see the extent to which her remarks have penetrated. In her cultural code, eyes are the "mirrors of the soul."

From the code perspective of the Puerto Rican student, assuming that he understood what offense he was initially guilty of, the increased vehemence of the teacher's remarks leaves him totally bewildered. What, in addition to the original offense, was he now guilty of in his behavior that should produce an intensification of the teacher's anger? According to his cultural code, his manner of response to an adult who was reproaching him was appropriately respectful, especially the lowering of his eyes. For in his culture to look an adult in the eyes when being scolded would be a sign of impudence and gross disrespect.

Not only was there a completely different, and in this case, almost opposite, "reading" of the sign (lowering of the eyes), chances are that the youth was not even aware that this part of his manner was responsible for provoking the increased hostility of the teacher. In addition, when the teacher lifted the boy's

chin to reestablish eye contact she violated that part of the person which the Puerto Rican regards much more sacredly than she does: the face, thereby inflicting on him from his perspective a punishment grossly incommensurate with the offense which, in this case, was also unknown to the student. What did he do that, one, intensified the teacher's anger, and two, was so bad as to prompt the teacher to violate the sanctity of his face. The teacher, looking at it from her code perspective, would hardly regard the lifting of the boy's chin as more than a negligible, let alone serious, violation.

In scene two there were several salient features among many more subtle ones that were interfering cross-culturally within the given context. The first feature was the presence of "rapping," a form of verbal and non-verbal behavior familiar to all males and females who operate within the Black cultural code, but generally unknown or unfamiliar to those operating outside of this code, such as most whites, and specifically, in this case, a white middle-class woman.

As a cultural pattern "rapping" defines the initial verbal and non-verbal phase of a male-female relationship. As a cultural mechanism it permits a Black man to approach a woman he does not know and begin talking to her, focusing her attention at the same time on those features of himself that he regards as masculine and attractive: personality, dress, intelligence and wit. Here as a cultural form, the art of repartee is practiced, polished and sharpened with the Black woman as deft as the man in handling the various verbal thrusts and parries of the ritual. Unlike white

mainstream culture, in Black culture it is the man who struts as much or more than the female. Even when he is not serious about pursuing a relationship he will "rap" to sharpen his line, his wit, or as one informant remarked, to "deposit his image." The perennial concern is with style. What counts among his peers and himself is to "score" or leave the impression that he could have "scored" if he wanted to.

White mainstream culture has no mechanism through which a man can approach a woman he does not know and begin talking to her with the expectation of pursuing a relationship. An Italian man from Rome I spoke to on a "standing-room-only" line several years ago was completely frustrated and bewildered at attempts to meet women during his stay here. "How do you get to know a woman in this country?" he asked, since among Italians there, as among Blacks here, this cultural mechanism <u>does</u> exist, often accompanied by a pinch, much to the chagrin of white American girls who go to Italy. Here, in approaching a woman on the street whom he felt he would like to meet, the Roman met with a consistently strong rebuff. He was ignorant of the culturally different attitude attached to this pattern of behavior. A woman here permitting herself to be "met" in this way feels that she accepts a definition of the situation in which a sexual outcome is anticipated, even expected. A woman met under a different set of circumstances defines a situation in which a sexual outcome is conceivable, but cannot be anticipated. An entirely different program of expectations and interpretations is set into operation in each instance where the same response under one program takes on a completely different moral character

than under the other. For example, a white American man who "picks up" a woman, because he now regards a sexual resolution as likely, would generally increase his pressure tactics, be more persistent, be less likely to take "no" for an answer, etc., and feel that such actions were "appropriate" given the initial definition of the situation: the woman was a "pickup." Under a different initial definition of the situation, he would perceive such actions as "inappropriate," and either not instigate them or be more amenable to their being thwarted.

The appropriate meeting ground for the American middle-class woman is a context whereby she is able to screen potential male suitors before she is ever even asked to meet them. The chosen context is invariably one that reflects some process of selection where potential male suitors are screened out on the basis of wealth, education, religion, vocation, avocation, etc., before the talking stage is even reached. That is, it is only <u>after</u> a person has qualified himself through certain social criteria that personality criteria (looks, style, intelligence) begin to matter in the choice of a mate. In Black culture the order of focus and concern is reversed. First, the male is screened on the basis of personality criteria and is accepted or rejected on those grounds before other social criteria are considered. The priority that status, for example, has over persons in mainstream culture, whether in choosing a mate, or showing deference in general, is an important distinction to point out from the priority given status and persons in Black culture. This difference will concern us increasingly later on.

Another element to consider is that by virtue of the cultural pattern of rapping, which potentially, makes a woman approachable to every Black man, Black women are able to avoid unwanted persistance and pursuit through the effective utilization of a variety of verbal or non-verbal "put-downs," such as by signifying, capping or louding.

White, middle-class American women, however, rely on other avoidance techniques than those requiring some kind of direct verbal insult, often seeking refuge by referring to the initial definition of the situation when sexual advances were considered remote and persistence inappropriate: "We hardly know each other," or by introducing some other external factor that might exert some kind of prohibition, "This is hardly the place for that." Therefore they are not likely to possess the ready facility that Black women have attained to effectively parry the Black male's verbal thrusts.

It might be pointed out that there are many remarks made in passing, such as on the street, which might be considered a form of rapping, but remain preliminary, i.e., with no follow-through by the man seemingly intended, and which generate little, if any, avoidance technique on the part of the Black female. Here the cultural code requires on the female's part little more than a greeting or other acknowledgment. Some verbal response seems indicated however both to acknowledge that a compliment has been paid, on the one hand, and to defer to, and thereby reaffirm, the cultural ritual in which male and female are participating. Failure to acknowledge the remark would have the effect of re-

jecting both maleness as well as culture and likely to invite some form of "put-down." For example, one of my Black female students reported that while walking to church with another "sister," one, however, who did not operate within this part of the Black cultural code, one of the men of a group on the street whom they had to pass made some remark like, "Hey foxes, you-all sure do look fine. How you doin?" My student responded and kept on walking, but her friend, who also kept on walking, kept looking straight ahead, and did not. This prompted the man to say louder and directly at her, "Hey baby, I said how you doin?" Still no reply or acknowledgment. Finally, just as she was about to enter the church the man said in a still louder voice so all could hear (exhibiting the verbal put-down technique known as "louding"), "What's the matter? Don't you recognize me with my clothes on?"

Now that we have seen something of the respective Black/white cultural patterns and perspectives as they operate <u>within</u> the same cultural group, we are in a position to explain the conflict in Black and white code perspectives and sensibilities as they are extended to operate <u>across</u> cultural boundaries, as in scene two.

By "rapping" to the teacher the Black male student initiated a program which, from his code perspective, was designed to elicit from the teacher some kind of "smart" verbal retort. The cultural requirement here is that, whether her response be favorable or unfavorable, it must be personal. She might focus specifically on what was being said to her, or on the way it was being said, or on the individual personality or style of the person saying it. His

code necessarily requires that it be directed at him personally, to take into account that he, as a unique individual, exists. His projected self-image is on the line.

The teacher, on the other hand, equated the Black male student's posture and "familiar" approach as a sexual invitation, comparable to what she might have experienced at one time with a white stranger trying to "pick her up" on the street. In her view, this is even worse because, one, the person is Black and a "student," and two, it is in the classroom, so she can't ignore it as she might try to do if the context were elsewhere. Unprepared cross-culturally to handle the verbal aspect of the situation according to the definition that the student had initiated, assuming even that she would know what his cultural requirements were, which in this case she did not, she acted according to her definition of the situation by becoming completely non-assertive, pleading with the student to "behave," "return to his seat," etc. This "helpless" posture, as it arouses feelings of pity and mercy among male members of her own cultural group, takes advantage of the strong directive implication within that "helpless" definition, to "leave her alone." To the student, however, such a response in that context, would arouse rather, feelings of contempt, because in his culture, you don't cop a plea (beg, plead) to a rap. If the teacher perceives rapping to be intimidating she must be very weak indeed and hardly worth respecting as a woman, let alone authority figure. Consequently, her control over the class will have been seriously undermined by this response.

On the other hand, looking to find something that will work, she might define the situation as a challenge to her "authority"

which she perceives as something that accrues to the office, an attribute of the role "teacher" rather than of the person "teacher." In her culture, she is aware that people get others to do things, most of the time, not by virtue of what they are as persons and personalities, or on the compelling nature of persuasive skills they have developed, but on the basis of the authority that is invested in their occupational status. Therefore, as she assumes the role of "teacher she feels she should be "listened to" and "obeyed."

The student on the other hand is focusing on the teacher-as-person and perceives authority not as something bestowed but as something earned, that a person who is an "authority" is so because he or she possesses superior attributes of personality, intelligence, wit, forcefulness and verbal power. He therefore regards a self-proclaimed authority which is devoid of those attributes as phony.

Therefore, the teacher's response is inappropriate because it forces the student to show deference to criteria that he regards as impersonal, external, and therefore irrelevant. In addition, by implication, the teacher's attitude tells him that only persons whose occupational status has been legitimized and confirmed by society are deserving of respect, and that personality, style, intelligence, strength, and varying degrees of verbal and physical ability, all of those personal attributes which establish a "rep" in his culture, don't count. Her response, in effect, confirms for him what his past education has made him only too painfully aware of, that according to the cultural norms of the teacher, he has no status, and therefore, as a reducible and negligible identity, is underserving of respect. The bitterness that the

latter response produces will linger in the student a long time, confirming existing antipathies to teachers, schools and the entire "educational process."

Contributing to cross-cultural interference in scene three was the different interpretation given to the structuring of spatial distance, in this instance to a proximity between the Puerto Rican and Anglo policeman of about eighteen inches. Edward Hall has pointed out in The Hidden Dimension that members of different cultures structure space in different ways, that a "comfortable" personal communication distance for white Americans is about twenty-one inches, for Latin Americans, eighteen inches, for Arabs, operating within the "olfactory" range, twelve inches, and so on. This structuring of the spatial distance between individuals falls within the category known as "Proxemics," which takes into account, among other things, the different protective space shields that individuals construct when talking to intimates, strangers, members of the same sex or race, opposite sex and race, etc., within one's own culture, and how these norms generally conflict cross-culturally. This protective space shield Hall refers to as a "space bubble." In the scene illustrated, the Puerto Rican man, in establishing what for him was "comfortable" communication distance, was piercing the "space bubble" of the Anglo policeman ("standing too close for comfort"). A proximity of eighteen inches for the Anglo policeman fell within a spatial range that he regarded as threatening. In reestablishing what for him was "comfortable" communication distance: twenty-one inches, the policeman was inadvertently sending a signal which the Puerto Rican interpreted as antagonistic, as an indication of an "unwillingness to communicate." More than likely, the latter would attempt to re-

establish his eighteen inch distance which the policeman, "tensing up," would renegotiate to twenty-one, and so on. Add to this interference variable the fact that neither communicant understood the other's language, the existence of many unresolved grievances within the Puerto Rican community, a police force oriented toward physical repression; mix in a hot and humid day, and you have concocted a combustible combination of ingredients. In 1965, this combination produced a riot in the Puerto Rican community of Chicago.

The importance of understanding that space, time and touch are structured differently among different cultural groups cannot be overestimated since it is precisely these patterns of our own behavior that we are <u>least</u> likely to perceive as being distinctive because being continually reinforced in our day-to-day contact, they are <u>most</u> likely to have been the ones most completely learned and felt to be most "natural." Therefore they are often perceived, not as differently structured "learned" behavior at all but as behavior that is uniformly structured and instinctive, common to all humans.

On the other hand, paradoxically, they are patterns that are most likely to be perceived of others when they are different, and most likely to come up for an ethnocentric value judgment, which invariably despises other behavior patterns to the extent that they are different from our own.

So, through our code perspective, we interpret Arabs talking to each other at their comfortable communication distance of twelve inches as "plotting." Black Americans, who touch each other more than white Americans do are perceived as "sensual." Blacks perceive white Americans as "cold" for the same reason.

What is conflicting in scene four (p. 2) is less obvious because in this case we are dealing with communicants who ostensibly are operating within the same cultural code, in this instance, that of white mainstream USA. This is not so in fact, however, since a specific code is not genetically transmitted but one that we acquire through a learning period extending well into adulthood. So, children can be expected to have acquired their parent's code only if and after they have proceeded along the same experiential track.

Briefly, the middle-class father's statement that "he will take them to the circus on Saturday," was interpreted by his children as a statement of fact, much like a promise. Through their code perspective, which is shared by persons who have, what Higman has called a "traditional personality:" children, poor people, those outside of the mainstream, they do not perceive as yet that statements made by mainstream people are not to be interpreted as statements of fact but only as statements of "high probability."

> "Middle-class statements which have the external form of certainty are known to all members of the middle-class to be probability statements rather than promises or contracts." (Higman, p. 8)

The father is aware, though his children are not, that before something can happen certain variables have to be present, and operative. So the father intended his statement to mean, "We will go to the circus on Saturday only if, 1. tickets are available; 2. they are not exorbitant in price; 3. the car doesn't break down, or there is not a subway strike; 4. there is not a demonstration by the Animal Welfare League, etc. and only if something of a higher priority doesn't come up which requires that he/they be there rather than at the circus.

As Higman has keenly noted, "The higher a middle-class person is in the communications network, the more frequently his appointments are preempted by higher priorities. Much of this time is spent in renegotiating appointments made and then broken. His reliability quotient is not based upon the keeping of appointments, but rather [upon] his consideration of others in the process of renegotiating them." (Higman, pp. 4-5.)

Because his children had not as yet acquired the mainstream code perspective, "going to the circus" initiated a program with a resolution that for them was felt to be anticipated. For their father, having learned well the ways of the mainstream, "going to the circus" fell into a more remote category: probable to conceivable. Therefore, the intensity of the children's disappointment was due to the fact that they had not as yet learned to temper their expectations. On the other hand, their father has learned that events cannot be relied upon with any degree of certainty and so has conditioned himself not to feel disappointment when something does not happen that he wants, even to the point of tempering his want for something. As Higman has noted, "Middle-class persons are trained to be losers . . . He freely applies for vastly more opportunities than he has any conception of potentially winning." (p. 6) In saying "it doesn't hurt to try" he is in fact also saying "it doesn't hurt to lose." However, at the same time as the mainstream person feels less disappointed when not obtaining something he wants, he also feels less guilty when he cannot deliver what he said he would. The impression given off to non-mainstream people is, that not only can the mainstream person not be counted on to

do what he says he will but that he will also be unsympathetic to those whose expectations were raised by what he said would happen, which accounts for the father's defensive response to his children. He is unsympathetic because he regards their raised expectations as "unrealistic," "realism" being an awareness of all of the factors that are involved and that need to work before something can happen. And finally, according to mainstream sensibilities, disappointments arising from an "unrealistic" appraisal of the situation are undeserving of sympathy.

PART II

Black and White Cultural Differences

That different cultural patterns should exist in the United States between Black and white Americans is not surprising given the general separation of the races here as well as the fact that their respective cultural origins were different. The extent to which such cultural patterns have persisted from Europe and Africa respectively or were created as a result of segregated conditions in the United States is the subject of much scholarly study and debate. That there are differences however, is beyond dispute. Yet, protestations are frequently heard from Blacks and other members of minority groups that they are "no different from anyone else." This is, of course, true, to the extent that all humans share things that are common to the species. So all humans have the capacity for speech. It does not follow therefrom however, that because of that, we all end up speaking the same language. What is universal is the capacity to learn; what we learn however, depends on where we have grown up, and who was part of the network of family, friends, acquaintances and institutions responsible for the transmission of what we know, what we do and how we do it. The patterns of behavior that emerge and the values and attitudes associated with such patterns, that are shared with other members of one's group, constitute the culture of that group. That Blacks as a group should share behavior patterns, values, perspectives, and sets of sensibilities, that are different from USA whites, is to be expected given the difference in origins and the difference between the Black and white experience in this country. That they should also share be-

havior patterns, values, perspectives, and sets of sensibilities, with USA whites, is also to be expected, given the extent to which Blacks and whites share the same experience in this country. So protestations that Blacks are "no different from anyone else," is both true and false. It is true to the extent that Blacks share that which is common to the species, and more specifically, in this country, common to the over-all American culture. It is also true that Blacks are "no different from anyone else," if it is recognized that, as all groups have a distinctively shared way of life, so do Blacks. But the statement is false if it is meant to suggest that Black Americans have no shared way of life significantly different from white Americans, just as it would be false to say that white Americans have no shared way of life or perspective that is different from white Europeans.

It is with the last meaning, which we have determined as false, that the statement is often made however, and for that reason, it would be more to the point, to respond not to what was said but to why it was said. Since we are concerned as much here with conflicting cultural sensibilities as we are with conflicting cultural patterns and perspectives it might be fruitful to ask why minority group persons would want to deny that any "differences" exist between their group and the dominant cultural group. To understand that, it is necessary briefly to examine the concept of the "melting pot" that America was proclaimed to be and the consequent pressures that were and are still being brought to bear upon the various minority groups to assimilate to the cultural "mainstream."

First of all, the "melting pot" concept was misleading as it implied that a culturally homogeneous America already existed or

was a distinct future possibility. Rather, if the term is to have any reified validity, it must refer to the process of acculturation and socialization of non-mainstream people and not to the product. As a process, the term was consistent with the interests and goals of the people that defined it, in this instance, the dominant white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. They developed the criteria that guaranteed the continuing dominance of this group by 1) establishing its members as the socio-cultural model to imitate, and 2) making success or failure an individual, as opposed to societal responsibility. They created the illusion that you too could become president of the bank if you just tried hard enough. All you needed were the "proper" qualifications. Only later did the applicants find out that "proper qualifications" included more than education, intelligence, and ability to do the job.

Therefore, underlying Black and other minority group protestation that they are "no different from anyone else" is the harsh realization that to be culturally different from this dominant group in this society, has been, and continues to be, a liability incurring severe social penalties. It is significant that the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant is the single group in our society for which no ethnic slur exists in the American English vocabulary. In fact they are not even identified as an "ethnic" group. Attempts to give the WASP the same currency and scope in usage as other ethnic terms have failed. As Higman has pointed out, one doesn't say "there are two WASPS getting on the bus." It is also significant that to become like the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant has been equated with becoming an "American," with the consequence that to maintain or proclaim other cultural values than those espoused by

this group has been the extent to which you were "un-American."

This is changing today to some extent, rather as a result of minority groups proclaiming their other cultural identity to be as "American" as that of the dominant group and generally resisting acculturation more openly, than because the dominant group has become less relentless in attempting to acculturate them.

For example, in Job Corp. training programs, Blacks are still "trained" in applying for a job to "look the personnel interviewer directly in the eye, when you talk to him," "don't wear sunglasses," and "shake his hand firmly." Blacks, operating within their own cultural code, when talking to each other, tend more toward an angle-to-angle approach, invariably wear "shades" (sunglasses), and "give skin" or the Black Power handshake, on greeting each other. The criteria for employment is still not based on whether you can do the job but on how "white" you behave.

The point here is that when members of a majority group have expressed their ethnocentric value judgments which denigrated the different behavior of other cultural minorities, such judgments have had a devastatingly coercive effect on the behavior and identity of the members of such groups to the extent that they have either ended up despising their group and themselves or paying a heavy social and psychological price in having to defend their other cultural values against the massive onslaught of majority opinion. As the American Indian, Black, Mexican American and Puerto Rican can attest, the tyranny of the majority can be as oppressive as any dictator, and exclusion based on cultural difference as devastating as that based on race.

Black and White Cultural Personalities: the Inter-relationships of Be/Say/Do

In discussion of the conflict in code perspectives in scenes two and four several points were raised with respect to basic cultural differences between Black and white Americans concerning the inter-relationship of be/say/do. This present discussion will extend the analysis of this relationship to illuminate additional cultural factors that are operative and likely to conflict when Blacks and whites interact with each other.

In our analysis of scene two we pointed out that the middle-class teacher perceived that she was entitled to be shown respect by virtue of the status and role of "teacher" that had been bestowed on her. With middle-class students this operating assumption would have been correct. They, as she, would perceive her power to direct others as something that is invested in her office and which accrues to her as she acquires that office. From the Black student's perspective however, deference is shown to person, and the attributes that that person manifests. The power to direct

others derives, not from office or role, but from the leadership attributes of strength, forcefulness, intelligence, persuasion, etc., that are part of the person. Where the teacher uses the prerogatives of office he uses the attributes of person to do things or to get others to do things for him. If one can call the attributes of person attributive be and the prerogatives of office extensional be we can see that there is a completely different and conflicting cultural value attached to their relative merit. In mainstream culture extensional be confers greater social prestige than attributive be. In Black culture, attributive be confers greater social prestige than extensional be. The middle-class teacher expected to be shown deference on the basis of her extensional be whereas the student was prepared to show deference only to attributive be. In terms of a response to rapping, the Black student was expecting a "personal" attributive be response but received in the teacher's assertion of "authority" an "official" extensional be response.

In mainstream culture extensional be has achieved greater social prestige than attributive be because of the belief that a wider impact on people and events can be made from an office than can be influenced by an individual or even a group of individuals. The prestige of office is measured by the scope and depth of impact and influence that is invested in it. The office of President of the United States is most prestigious because directives emanating from that office have a global impact. The offices of governor and mayor are less prestigious because the scope and depth of their impact is less, and so on. While expressed in spatial terms of

scope and depth, the real criterion that determines the prestige of office is the number of people whose lives are affected by what is done in that office. So the office of mayor of New York City has greater prestige than the office of governor or most states, etc. Ultimately then, the prestige of extensional be directly depends on the nature and importance of the kinds of things we can promote, influence or effect through the power of our office or social position. Significantly, our curiosity about people begins by inquiring about their social position, role or office. Also significant is that we ask about this information in terms of doing. At parties, we ask people "what do you do?" We do not expect replies like "I play the piano," or "I run very fast." Those are personal do (specifically, performance do) responses which derive from attributive be and what is being asked about is people's capacity for promotional do which we feel derives from extensional be, specifically, the number of people who are under their official influence. Weighing this information against the prestige of our own office we can then determine how much deference we need to show or are entitled to receive from them. Note that respect is shown to extensional be not to attributive be, primarily to the person's office and only by extension to the person. The reason for this is that the prestige of attributive be derives from personal do and the prestige of extensional be derives from promotional do and in mainstream society promotional do invariably has higher status than personal do. The promoter or sponsor has his name higher on the marquee than the performers. It is "Sol Hurok presents..." or "NCAA football," and so on. Those who perform can have high social status in mainstream society, but those who promote performers have higher social status.

Because we feel that promotional do confers higher social prestige than personal do, we essentially channel our resources and energies toward the acquisition of the resident power of high office, the prestige of which redounds to our person by extension. The basic resources for the acquisition of high office are money and "connections." Other promotional factors are then introduced in addition, such as organization and advertising. As any political campaign manager can tell you, winning high office depends on superior organization and promotion which in turn depends on having more "connections" (supporters with money!) and more money oneself than one's opponent. Since the acquisition and holding of office is not perceived as a consequence of possessing superior attributes of intelligence, wisdom, humanity, but rather on promotional factors that are extrinsic and irrespective of attributive be, personal attributes are seen as less valuable in the acquisition of high office, may even, in some instance be seen as a liability--there is no person the political campaign manager hates worse than a candidate who won't compromise on his ideals--and are therefore down-graded. In addition, an incongruity often appears to the more traditionally minded public, not so to the opportunistically minded, between the importance of the office held and the attributes of the person holding it. Since the attainment of office is not based on personal attributes to begin with the appearance of such incongruities should not be surprising. However it is important to note that the feeling that the President of the Unites States ought to possess superior leadership qualities is reminiscent of a time when person and role were felt to be naturally fitted to each other, that a person became

a leader <u>because</u> he possessed superior attributes of persuasion, forcefulness and intelligence that made others <u>naturally</u> accept him as a leader, that a person became a teacher <u>because</u> he was naturally endowed with a superior ability to communicate, etc. This notion of reciprocal assoociation of person and office is a traditional one reflecting an integrative view of oneself and the world. Countering this notion, which is dichotomous, is opportunism. Where the middle class person has been traditionally attributive, he is opportunistically extensional; where doing has been traditionally personal it is opportunistically promotional. In terms of goal, <u>personal do</u> (performance, manipulation) is person-directed, in which intelligence, physical and verbal ability are the instruments used. Its purpose is to create <u>affect</u>. In contrast, promotional do is event-directed, in which instance <u>people</u> become the instruments used to make things happen. Personal do is individual. Promotional do is serial and sequential involving a variety of individuals. The program within personal do is compressed: intent, ability and opportunity are integrated to produce act within a perceptually defined time period. The program within promotional do is extended: design, money and organization are coordinated to produce event within a time period the limits of which cannot be perceptually contained.

In Black culture the focus is also on "what you do," but, because the <u>do</u> here is personal, rather than promotional, which is the case in mainstream culture, the concern is, in addition, with how you do it and how well you do it: style and

skill manifested in performance. Therefore, the culture, in a very traditional way, promotes the development and demonstration of those skills which reflect on an individual's underlying intelligence, verbal ability, speed, strength, agility and endurance. As any or all of these qualities become manifest in a variety of cultural activities, such as "gaming," "rapping," singing, dancing, fighting, ball-playing, etc., they are appropriately judged and appreciated.

To those who excel at one or all of these activities goes the respect of his peers. To embellish his "rep" the individual invests his performance with action and style which serve to mark both his identity and individuality.

Denied offices of power and influence within the mainstream culture historically, there was little derived status that most inner-city Blacks could extract from their job that would confer on them greater prestige within their group than they could achieve personally. The effect has been that it has left them without an extensional be cultural personality, which is to say, that what counts first and foremost among this group, which is contrary to what counts among mainstream personalities, is what you are as a person, not what office or job you happen to hold. Even in such instances where office has social significance within the Black community, there still exists in the main, the traditionally felt reciprocal association between person and office, where the person is seen as primarily investing the office with his attributes and only secondarily deriving from the office its prerogatives. For example, the

preacher, in order to "call himself one," must possess verbal power and the ability to create affect in his audience. The hustler must have a knowledge of the street, an ability to "rap," and possess a keen understanding as to what motivates others.[1]

The code perspective in mainstream culture then, sees personal do emanating from attributive be and promotional do essentially emanating from extensional be. The Black cultural code perspective perceives both forms of doing as emanating from attributive be.

As a consequence of these differences in code perspectives, interference has invariably occured where Black and white have interacted around this issue. A classic example, made classic simply by the number of times it has been repeated in the last few years,--I myself, have observed it on at least four separate occasions--is as follows:

> A panel of Blacks have been talking to a predominately white audience about segregation, discrimination, etc. A white person whose sensibilities have been jarred gets up and asks one of the Black panelists, "What do you want me to do?" The Black respondent invariably answers, "I'm not going to tell you what to do." The white person sits down, flustered and frustrated, but above all, bewildered. What has happened?

For one, the white person's question "What do you want me to do?" was one that perceived doing in promotional, rather than personal terms, as emanating from extensional be: office, rather than attributive be: person. Since he, as an individual, held no office from which he could influence others to do something about discrimination, segregation, unemployment, etc., he felt

[1] This does not preclude the fact that many Black people have acquired extensional be personalities from having operated in the mainstream culture.

appropriately helpless and frustrated. The Black panelist, on the other hand, perceived promotional as well as personal do emanating from attributive be: person. According to the Black cultural perspective, the only requirement for doing is that first, you have to "get yourself together," which no one else can do for you but yourself. Therefore, by telling the white person in the audience what to do he felt he would be telling him what he ought to be as a person, which the Black person would regard as both presumptive and preemptive, or worse, perceiving that <u>his</u> person was being used as reference to legitimize what the white person was to do rather than the white person's own self, which he would perceive as a "cop-out" by the white person altogether. Therefore, the Black person said, "I'm not going to tell you what to do."

A further consequence of the dichotomy among white mainstream cultural personalities between attributive and extensional be and of personal and promotional do, has to do with the notion of responsibility, and from that self-concept. Like the father in scene four, the middle-class person feels no sense of responsibility or guilt for the failure of promotional do. For example, whites feel no personal guilt or responsibility for <u>de facto</u> segregation, unemployment, "institutional racism," etc. Such failures are seen as resulting from an inability to control variables. On a personal level he feels as un-responsible for unemployment as he does for the thunderstorm that cancels the ballgame. Thoroughly indoctrinated by the maxim of his generation, "You can't fight City Hall," he equates unemployment and thunder-

storms because both create in him the same feeling of powerlessness to do anything about either. If anyone is to be responsible for the failure of promotional do it is the government, especially the federal administration, but even here any sense of responsibility is given short shrift, on the one hand because the public is generally aware of the variables that need to be controlled to bring about desegration of schools for example, and are ready to excuse such government failure given the "reality" of the situation, "reality" being the existing "inviolate" attitudes of people that only "time"can change, and, on the other hand, because it was a policy of the previous administration and therefore does not commit the present government, there being no obligation to carry on programs initiated by one's predecessor. This is what is meant when one talks about a "new" administration or a "new" senate, etc., i.e., lack of responsibility for what the "old" administration or "old" senate did. As a result Black persons and those of other minority groups are faced with certain dichotomies when confronting the mainstream cultural personality which are in general conflicting with their attempts to assign responsibility for the reality in which they and others are being victimized. The dichotomy between attributive be and extensional be from which personal and promotional do are respectively derived, plus the absence of personal responsibility for extensional be and promotional do, practically ensures that pleas and protests by these groups to "do" something about discrimination, segregation, etc., when addressed to a white audience will have little effect. Whites generally reject the notion of "white guilt," individually, because they may not have been per-

sonally instrumental in discriminating--one does not need to feel guilty over connivance--or societally, since personal responsibility and therefore guilt, does not extend to what was perpetrated promotionally. The federal government, which might have been held to be responsible for promotional do, has conveyed the notion that it does not feel obligated by any acts or commitments made by previous governments, no matter how historically responsible these commitments were at the time they were made. In the latter case it is as though each new administration provides a new historical slate and is accountable only for what it does while in office. The net effect is a lack of continuity with the past as well as a lack of responsibility for it. Therefore, we can with "clear conscience" break bona fide treaties that past American governments have made with American Indians, feel no responsibility toward preserving America's natural beauty or wild life, or historical buildings, etc. Transformed by opportunism Christmas in America has become a commercial enterprise of little religious significance.

It is consistent with the mainstream culture's pragmatic sense that increased job opportunities for Blacks have been a response to an explosive social climate rather than the notion that something may be owed Blacks as a result of the historical fact that the American condition of slavery and subsequent discrimination kept Blacks jobless or at menial tasks. Looked at in cultural terms, Black claims for reparations would have received much more serious consideration from a more traditionalist culture than ours.

Talk; Credibility; Self-concept

Programs and Promises

In our present discussion so far we have considered the different inter-relationship that exists between be and do in Black and white mainstream culture respectively. We have shown how this has produced a different set of operating assumptions which, in two cited instances of Black-white interaction we have seen conflicting and which establish a basis for continual communication failure between these two groups. Yet be and do are frequently made manifest through the medium of language: talk. The different uses of talk that are operative within the respective cultural contexts of each group, when extended to cross-cultural contexts, invariably transmit signals that are misread by the other group, especially with regard to the credibility of be and the eventuality of do. How say operates as a functioning member of the be-do matrix developed above and contributes independently to cross-cultural interference will occupy our present discussion.

Traditionally, talk is process, a means to action. Opportunistically, talk is end, intended to substitute for or replace action. Traditionally, talk is a declaration of true intent. Opportunistically, talk is used to bely intent. Traditionally, talk is informative, expressive, and obviously directive. Opportunistically, talk is provocative and subtly directive, i.e., manipulative.

Within Black and white mainstream culture talk is used both traditionally and opportunistically. Where interference occurs in cross-cultural contexts, as in the few instances yet to

be cited, one can frequently point to a use of language by one group that was opportunistic but which was interpreted as traditional by the other, or vice versa. Some examples of these uses follow.

In Black and white mainstream culture, talk, as it emanates from attributive be and leads to personal do, can be said to be process, and thereby traditional. A proclamation of intent like "I am going outside to play," is a statement that integrates person: be, and act: do, through talk. It is a statement that signals intent and suggests that action will result. Credibility to what is said is established if action follows. Action follows if there is both will and ability to do what was proclaimed would be done. Credibility, which originally is attached to say redounds to be, if action consistently follows. In such instance we can speak of a be--say--do synthesis or reciprocity: we believe the person when we believe what he says; we believe what he says if what is said is confirmed by reality (act).

On the other hand, talk can start out as process, as a true indicator of intent, deriving from attributive be, but because what was said would happen required promotion, i.e., involved the control over more variables than were within the power of the person to maintain, it may happen that what was said would happen didn't. This is illustrated in scene four where the father said to his children, "Let's go to the circus on Saturday." Failure to go was attributed not to a lack of will, but to a lack of ability to control variables, in this case the

variables that would have ensured that tickets would be available. In such instance, action is perceived by both parties as not following talk, but if action in other past instances was perceived to have followed talk, the father's credibility with himself: that he believes he is telling the truth, and with his children: that to them, he says what he means and he does what he says, is still intact. However, if action is not perceived to follow talk in a rather consistent fashion, then talk is no longer seen as process but as end, and as one repeatedly perceives a dichotomy between <u>say</u>/<u>do</u> he then begins to question the <u>be-say</u> reciprocity which is the basis of credibility. The conclusion is drawn that if you do not do what you say you intend, you are also not the truthful person that you claim to be. You are perceived to use words opportunistically rather than traditionally and a different mind-set is needed to deal with persons who use words in this way. The important point here is that you might perceive yourself as using words traditionally even while others perceive you to be using words opportunistically, but that is because credibility is invariably lost with others long before you lose it with yourself. If others are correct than this may be considered a period of <u>self-deception</u>, which is precisely the point we have reached in our present day society in one area of communication between, not only mainstream cultural personalities and Black cultural personalities but between mainstream culture and its youth and is the basis for much cross-cultural interference.

With respect to the relation between _say_ and _promotional do_, mainstream America has been for a long time, and continues to be, especially in its middle and older generations, operating under the traditional thesis, that _promotional do_ follows from _extensional be_, with about the same degree of certainty that _personal do_ follows from _attributive be_. This is true despite the recent widely publicized failures of _promotional do_ in the areas of poverty, human relations, environmental control, etc. The reason for the persistence of this belief is due to a variety of factors such as:

1. the actual present and past successes of promotional do, like putting men on the moon, the economic recovery of Europe after World War II, etc.

2. illusions of successes, generated more by the past than the present, and promoted by such slogans as "American prosperity," "an increasing GNP (Gross National Product)," "the good life," "the land of good and plenty," "farm surpluses," etc. and

3. American tradition, which has had an abiding, if not always realistic, faith in the problem-solving ability of its technology, and as a result of that, a belief in the ability of America to control the future. As Higman also notes, the middle-class "is overly optimistic about the possibilities of problem solving and changing the course of the future. Middle-class persons naively suppose that, with effort, they can create happiness in marriage and raise non-neurotic children." (p. 6) This tradition in turn evolved from one of the fundamental premises of

American culture, viz., that man controls nature.

Therefore while promotional do has "failed," to those who have acknowledged its failure, i.e., the younger "anti-establishment" generation, who like Blacks, can be considered non-mainstream cultural personalities since they do not share their parent's cultural code in many critical respects, it has not failed sufficiently to cause even this small element within the white middle-class community to alter their underlying assumption that promotional do follows say with reasonable certainty, i.e., it is not technology that is the "bad guy" but "technology for profit," not the formula but its application.

On the other hand a marked characteristic of the mainstream cultural personality is that he does not acknowledge that promotional do has failed at all, i.e., he regards the "failure" to make words a reality but a "temporary set-back." Promotional do will after all, eventually, if not immediately, become a reality. "Time" will ultimately vindicate the truth and validity of this traditional formula. That do ought to follow say is felt generally by the entire middle class, whether they admit or not, that promotional do has failed. This is revealed by the statement often heard when one does not want to do something, "As long as we don't say it, we don't have to do anything about it." While some mainstream people may be sincere in their feeling that time will in fact resolve the temporary impasse between say and promotional do, non-mainstream people feel that the middle-class person has opportunistically introduced a means to avoid doing something that he doesn't want to do. For example, he can decide not to say he is going to do something, and thereby avoid the coercive element im-

plicit in saying, or, if he says he is going to do something he can introduce the time factor which allows for an indeterminate interim period between _say_ and _do_, which permits him to postpone indefinitely doing what he doesn't want to do, at the same time as it acquits him of having to accept responsibility for the immediate failure of do. It also allows him to maintain faith in the thesis that _do_ follows _say_, as well as to maintain credibility with himself simply by proclaiming intent. The consequence of all of this is that, to the middle-class cultural personality, commitment to a cause or purpose can be realized verbally, _without_ the confirming reality of act being necessary. He does feel it is important to make the verbal commitment however. Therefore, white mainstream people see greater virtue in _de facto_ segregation of the North than in _de jure_ segregation of the South, because the latter fact reflects unwillingness, a failure to make a verbal commitment, which mainstream people feel does redound to their person: attributive be, but the former reflects only on their momentary "inability" to control variables, for which they feel they cannot be held responsible and which "time" will ultimately correct in any event.

From the Black cultural perspective, which is always centered on reality, the white mainstream unwilling/unable distinction is a mentalistic nicety of little consequence. What counts to Blacks is whether something happens or doesn't. Whether a non-happening is a result of design of impotence, a crucial point for white middle-class Americans, is really beside the point for Blacks. It makes little difference to the reality of a pensioner whether her social security is delayed because of personal malice, benign

or willful neglect, or a mail strike. Besides, it is often difficult to perceive the difference between those who don't want to do something, but don't want to say they don't, and those who want to do something but can't especially as they both say the same thing, and how do you distinguish false from true intent? and why bother, since the net effect is the same anyhow: nothing happens. In addition, Blacks do not perceive the failures of promotional do as "temporary" or as reflecting an inability to control variables. The obvious reason for not regarding the failures of promotional do as temporary is that they have already waited an interminably long time for the words to eventuate into reality. The less obvious reason and one which also challenges the "inability" excuse for the failure of promotional do is that they see such failure as operating selectively. That is to say, we can "promote" a man to the moon, a war in Vietnam, or any logistically complex operation that we want to, but we cannot rid America of hunger or the ghetto of rats, or provide sufficient housing for the poor, etc. Therefore Black people have interpreted what whites regard as a temporary interim between say and promotional do as in fact a say/do impasse, one reflecting not inability, but selective unwillingness. As Mrs. Unita Blackwell noted in the preface to Julius Lester's book: Look Out, Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama! (Grove Press, 1968)

> I feel that the federal government have proven that it don't care about poor people. Everything that we have asked for through these years has been handed down on paper. It's never been a reality.

Therefore, Blacks view de facto segregation of the North as reflecting the same unwillingness to integrate as de jure segregation of the South except that in the North, pointing to the say/do dichotomy, you have now added hypocrisy. Therefore, what whites perceive as inability, Blacks perceive as "refusal;" what whites perceive here as using words in a traditional way Blacks interpret as using words in an opportunistic way, to "make them believe something is going to happen, when it isn't, to keep them quiet."

One of the crucial differences in perception here between mainstream and Black cultural personalities has to do with the definition of "ability" in the mainstream formula: intent + ability (power + opportunity) = act; this is where the nub of this "interference" problem is. White mainstream Americans often see the power invested in their office as fixed or severely restricted, as a "given," much as they see the attitudes and social stratification of the present society as essentially immutable, another "given." Promotional do is perceived as operating within these rather stringent limitations, which, for mainstream people, define the structure of the situation and are for the most part unnegotiable. The feeling is that the power of direction which is invested in their office and which is used to get things done is office-specific: an immutable prerogative which one can legitimately expand only when one moves into a higher office. There is a clear sensitivity to the possibility that in acting in an energetic or forceful way one is arrogating to oneself power that is not delegated to the office that is held.

Yet the ingredient that non-mainstream cultural persons feel needs to be part of the formula is the power of effort and per-

sistence. They point out that how bad you want something is reflected by how hard you are willing to push for it and by the price you are willing to pay to get it. Do you try for five minutes and then quit, or for ten hours a day, day after day, year after year. The time and money that you invest is an index of your concern and a mark of the depth of your intent. They perceive that in our society, the directive power of say, without simultaneous pressure on intervening agents, is defunct ("God is dead!). They regard the definition of the directive powers of office in a bureaucratic structure as promotionally self-defeating, as not making the most efficient use of time and energy, which comprise the power of effort. That is why non-mainstream cultural personalities among the youth of today feel they need often to act extra-officially.

The Panthers and the Public

The first example of communication failure evolving from conflicting cultural perceptions in the use of language focused on white mainstream use of language which they perceived was "traditional" ("I mean what I say"), which Black people perceived was opportunistic ("you don't mean what you say"). This second example is a reversal of the first, and shows Black people using language in an opportunistic way which was interpreted by the white community however, as using language in a traditional way.

A brief discussion of the respectively different means by which personal credibility is established in Black culture as compared with white mainstream culture will provide the basis for explaining the communication failure between the two groups in the

second example.

In Black culture you are what you do. Doing rather than saying redounds to attributive be: what you are. What you say may or may not be an accurate reflection of what you are and may or may not lead to action. For example, on the street trying to appear "bad" (fearless, tough) is a posture that you maintain or an image that you project even if you never need to prove it. Talking tough or boasting adds to this impression. For example, Muhammed Ali's boast, "I'm the greatest," is indicative of the certain amount of verbal puff that accompanies the male strut in Black male culture.

For example, among his male peers you might hear the Black male say, "Well, you'd be better locked up in a phone booth sandpapering a lion's ass (and that's close contact), than fuckin with me," or, "You'd do better jumping in a fire with gasoline suit on than be jumping on my chest," (Abrahams, DDIJ p. 47). In "Names, Graffiti and Culture," Herbert Kohl and James Hinton give numerous illustrations of public declarations that are designed to promote the "bad" image that is held in such high regard by street people in general, like "Killer Al of 115" and others, which decorate the walls of the houses and school yards in the inner-city.

In "rapping" to a Black woman the Black male consistently refers to his "superior" sexual powers as in "I may not be the man of yo' dreams on top, but you ain' never had no dreams like the one I kin give, 'cause I'm a lover," or, "Ain't nothin like bein loved 'cept being loved--and I'm the <u>King</u> of that field," and so on. Graffiti on desks in all Black inner-city high schools inscribed by Black male students give continual testimony to this exaggerated

self-reference as "lover." That these boasts are not taken literally is obvious to anyone operating within the Black cultural frame. For example, a Black woman who didn't want to be bothered by the particular Black male "rapping" to her in the above example "got on his case" precisely by exploding the "puff" element in his remark. She said, "Nigger, you ain' shit and you know I know." In the following example the exaggeration is obvious even to those operating outside the Black cultural frame: "I was fighting a guy in the ring and I swung at him with a straight right and missed. And the wind was so strong that the breeze gave his manager pneumonia and he died." (Abrahams, p. 241). The point here is that "Killer Al of 115" need not <u>actually</u> be a killer to promote the "bad" image. That he says he is <u>like</u> a "killer," i.e., 'tough,' might sufficiently serve his purpose, without his needing to actually kill anyone. As with the other examples cited, it must be understood that language is being used here metaphorically, to produce affect. To understand whether intent is to be taken literally you have to determine whether the use of language here is strictly traditional: informative, or whether its function is also manipulative: provocative or subtly directive. To the extent that talk is provocative: used to arouse emotion such as anger, or fear, or subtly directive: designed to produce some action or response that would benefit the speaker, it cannot be interpreted literally as an indication of true intent. The function of Black Panther rhetoric for example is patently opportunistic, i.e., provocative and subtly directive, by which I mean that its purpose is to produce affect by evoking a portent of "doomsday" through which they hope to gain for the Black

community some immediate or intermediate advantage. We recognize this use of language in the foreign arena. We know that Chinese reference to us as a "paper tiger" reveals a good deal more about them than it does about us with regard to the reliability that action will follow what is said. Sinologists have been advising our government for years that you can't take the Chinese "growl" at face value. Newspaper correspondents in the Middle East invariably dismiss Arab reports of clashes with Israelis, relying for accuracy on Israeli accounts of what happened instead. In effect, they are interpreting Arab statements opportunistically in recognition that Arab culture uses language in this way. This is not to say that you cannot attach complete credibility to what is said within the Black culture. You can to the extent that language is used traditionally for purposes of communicating information, expression and obvious direction, which is in fact, the way language is used most of the time. Black cultural expressions like "pulling your coat," "running it (on) down," "turning (someone) on," "hipping (someone) to," "telling it like it is" reflect traditional language uses of giving information and advice to which maximum credibility is attached; but as language is used opportunistically, as in other Black speech events such as shucking, jiving, rapping, gripping, signifying, sounding, louding, etc., it cannot be interpreted literally. This is especially true of language that Black people use when interacting with "the Man." In such cross-cultural contexts Black use of language is often opportunistic. A history of survival forces you to look for expedients, take advantage of opportunities, and focus on what will and what will not work.

In contrast to the way language is used in the Black community, language in the white community, except in certain professions, is not used manipulatively at all. This is because directive use of language in the white community emanates from extensional be on both the personal and official level generally in the form of an order or request. That is to say there is usually present between mainstream people some status differential which makes manipulative use of language unnecessary. If you are of higher status then you order. If you are of lower status than you request permission to do or in the extreme, beg and plead. If you are of more equal status then you advise or suggest, or hesitate to direct at all, and so on. Manipulative use of language occurs when operating from lower or equal status. People of higher status, who can be assertive, need not be manipulative. So the saleslady in a department store who cannot order you to buy, flatters you. The life insurance salesman gives you the impression that you are going to die tomorrow. Advertising attempts to create a need or desire where previously none existed, and so on. The crucial point of difference here is that in white culture, even where manipulative language is used as in the last three examples cited, one does not use proclamations of intent manipulatively, i.e., people generally don't say they are going to do something for the purpose of producing affect.[1] In Black street culture, this occurs all the time in the form of hustling or "gaming" which is working someone's mind for goods and/or services, and Black people have developed a mind-set that allows them to

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[1]Even though Blacks perceived whites doing this in the first example, i.e., making them believe something was going to happen when it wasn't, whites did not perceive themselves doing that; to them, the failures of promotional do resulted from default or impotence, not by design, even though Blacks saw it as by design, i.e., lack of commitment.

perceive such "gaming" maneuvers and enjoy them when they are for play, appreciate them when they are for profit and subvert them when the "game" is being "whupped" on them. This is precisely the way the Panthers have been using language, but to a white group that doesn't have the cultural mind-set (code) to perceive it. Therefore, to Panther proclamations of intent whites have applied their say-do formula which is, proclaimed intent + power and opportunity = act. Since credibility of intent in the white community is already established by what you say, that you don't do what you say is attributed to lack of power and/or opportunity, not to the fact that you might not have literally intended what you said but were really interested in getting people excited, etc. In effect, the local and federal governments have relied on this formula to justify its repression of the Panthers. Lacking deeds by which they could prosecute them they focused on what the Panthers said leaving the public to conclude that the Panthers were lacking only power and opportunity to realize their intent. It has been in effect an operation based on the principle "get them before they get you." In response to this repression the Black community and a growing number of be-do cultural personalities within the white community have been defending the Panthers on the basis of what they have and haven't done. Cross-cultural interference occurred between the Panthers and the public because the public gave a more literal interpretation to the revolutionary rhetoric of the Panthers and the "bad" image that they were projecting, than the latter intended. While the Panthers in their strategy might have relied on this difference to promote affect and thereby obtain some immediate benefits,

it ultimately backfired on them since the credibility of intent that they established with the mainstream public by virtue of what they said was cynically used by the police to justify repression of them.

PART III

Composition/Performance

One of the important differences between the Black and white perspective leading to cross-cultural interference is the difference in cultural focus along the composition-performance dimension. As Charles Keil has pointed out, especially with respect to music, African and African derived genres such as Black American Jazz, are essentially performance centered, whereas Western music, designed for "listening," is composition centered.

Said another way, Western "understanding" is an analytical process. We feel our understanding of something increases as we take it apart and analyze it. Our appreciation of something increases to the extent that we have analyzed it. Our aesthetic is in the main an aesthetic of input and reflects an exercise of the mind. Gratification comes through the revelation of "embodied meaning." As Keil has pointed out it is a consequence of the Western compositional tradition that "a classics fan will put a score in your lap and ask 'Do you see how beautifully it all fits together'" (Keil, p. 347).

On the other hand the Black cultural focus is on output. Understanding and appreciation derives from performance. While the white cultural aesthetic is visual and mental, focusing on word, composition and form, the Black cultural aesthetic is respectively oral and motor, focusing on deed, performance and expression. Gratification comes not from the revelation of "embodied meaning" but, using Keil's term, from the degree of "engendered feeling."

For the Black sensibility, as Duke Ellington has said, "it don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing." For the white sensibility, it means a good deal before it ever begins to swing.

White audiences are passive-receptive. Black audiences are active-participative. These dualities that I am mentioning are not dichotomies in the strict sense, that is, they are not a question of either/or. Rather they are complementary in focus. As Keil has pointed out "a good composer gives some spontaneity to his form and, conversely, a good improvisor tries to give some form to his spontaneity" (p. 338). Said another way what the Black mind begins, his body develops and transforms.

This complementary emphasis can be seen in many areas besides music. At white parties people talk. At Black parties they dance. In contemporary poetry, it is significant that Black poetry is written to be heard, while white Western poetry is written to be read. The conception behind a Black poem often intends for it to be developed, transformed and interpreted through performance in order to achieve maximum affect. Within the Black cultural aesthetic total effect is achieved when total affect is achieved. The prestige channel of communication for Blacks is oral-aural. The prestige channel of communication for Western literati is visual-mental. Words constitute only a part of the total form of the Black poem. Words constitute the total form of a Western poem. As Louis Simpson has recently written regarding the poetry of the Sixties, "As for reading poetry aloud--it was understood that, as the poem was a self-contained object, the sound of the human voice had little to do with it. If you were compelled through some unfortunate circumstance

to read a poem aloud, the only way was to read it as flatly as possible. To give the words any sort of expression would be cheating." (Louis Simpson, "Poetry in the Sixties--Long Live Blake! Down with Donne!" The New York Times Book Review, Dec. 28, 1969, Sec. 7, p. 1).

That analysis pervades the entire Western cultural aesthetic in almost all areas can be corroborated, ironically, by analysis. In evaluating a Language Arts Curriculum in an all Black High School over a period of the past year, I found that eighty percent of what was going on in the classroom was analytical. Black children were being given knowledge <u>about</u> what they already knew to <u>do</u>. They learned the various names for things, what a "direct object" was, what a "transitive verb" was, what an "independent and a dependent clause" was, etc., even though they obviously knew what they were on a functional level; that is, they already <u>used</u> "nouns" and "transitive verbs" and "direct objects" and "independent and dependent clauses" in their speech: so what "knowledge" was being given them: an analytical knowledge, a knowledge <u>about</u>, with the assumption that somehow their ability to do would be mysteriously transformed by this information. Unhappily, this is not the case. It has yet to be shown that analysis, in and of itself, can be translated into performance. For example, a knowledge of "grammar" has yet to make one speak or write "better." Rather, by making people more anxious or self-conscious over the language they do use, it often produces the opposite effect.

Yet what does turn the Black student on is performance, something which integrates his mental and motor parts. He needs a functional-motorized curriculum, but he gets an analytical-mentalistic

one. Why? Because that's what has turned the teacher on and the people who write curricula and that's because in the mainstream cultural tradition they equate analysis with understanding, appreciation and "education," a rather narrow ethnocentric perspective. The feeling of most Black students I have spoken to is that the present curriculum is both boring and irrelevant. The absentee rate in inner-city schools is clear testimony to that. Yet the teachers feel that what they're doing is somehow meaningful, although they are at a loss to explain in what way. The more candid teachers feel if they didn't do analysis, they wouldn't know what else to do, which is quite true since a Black language arts curriculum does not as yet exist. Nevertheless, it is clear that what interferes here on a daily basis in school and elsewhere is the difference in Black and white cultural traditions which have shaped conflicting perspectives and attitudes over curricula, classroom structure, role and presentation of material.

PART IV

Empathic Impasse

One of the most disturbing aspects of Black/white interaction is the apparent inability for whites to achieve empathic transfer with a Black person and his experience. It is only when a middle-class white person has a "Black" experience as in Black Like Me, Soul Sister, Hey, White Girl that other whites appear to be able to identify with it. For example, no magazine asked a Black person to describe what it was like

to be the only Black person in an otherwise all white school, neighborhood, office or institution. Yet, when a middle-class white person in a Black context experiences isolation,

discrimination, or harassment, it becomes newsworthy. In effect, the same socio-cultural criteria which are used in choosing a mate or in determining how much respect a person is entitled to receive are also used to qualify a person for empathy. So a person who is non-white or poor, or crippled, or old, or is in prison, or a mental institution, or in a foreign country, or holds politically different views, or maintains culturally different patterns of behavior, or performs religiously different rituals, or has hair on his face, to the extent that identification on socio-cultural grounds becomes hazy or difficult, is the extent to which we discredit his pain, sorrow, misfortune and suffering. As Blacks have said, when Jefferson was writing the "Bill of Rights" he didn't have the Black slaves on his plantation in mind. The indifference of USA mainstream whites to the condition of those who do not "qualify" for membership in their group has prompted the accusation from these other groups that whites have no "soul." Adapting a phrase of Eric Erickson, from Gandhi's Truth, the number of "dirty specks in our moral vision" blinds us to the human condition. Because of the precedence of "soul" in Black culture in Black-white encounters what matters to the Black person is not what you say as much as what you feel about what you say, not what you know as much as what you are. As any number of us have experienced in talking before Black audiences a knowledge of Black language and culture is a necessary but not sufficient criterion for establishing credibility, gaining admission to, or acknowledgment from, the group. Blacks want to know first, "where's he at," "what bag is he coming out of?", and so on. This is also true of white audiences to some extent, except that frequently,

especially at professional meetings, white speakers separate information from feeling, leaving out affect because information is perceived as carrying the "message." For them what you know is more important than what you are; with Blacks, it is more important what you are than what you know. The shared assumption among Blacks is that before they can completely evaluate what you say or feel secure about what you will do with what you know, they have to evaluate your sincerity. Since sincerity is difficult to ascertain they will often ask instead sticky questions like, "Why are you here?," "Why are you telling us this?," "Would you leave if we asked you to?," testing, in short, whether you would defer to Black sensibilities, or whether you would allow yourself to be accountable to them.

At the last American Anthropological Association meeting in New Orleans (1969), the refusal of the Black participants in the symposium on "Hunger in America," to divulge the information which they had gathered to the almost exclusively large white group that was present was indicative of the above perspective. They indicated that they would give this information out to a smaller select group but not to the large group as a whole. Why?

On the one hand it was because, as they stated, there was no confidence that the information they would give would be received by the total group with sincerity and good faith, and on the other that what was being transmitted was not just information but an attitude toward that information and that to receive one without the other would be a distortion, and, for that reason, a disservice to those who provided the data. As the means by which one acquires data relies often on affect, e.g., mutual trust, one can argue that,

as feeling is an integral part of the acquisition of data it is part of the "message" and therefore, should be an integral part of its transmission as well.

In one sense, we see the unwillingness of the Black participants to give information as an indictment of this white middle-class group's failure to achieve empathic transfer with groups other than their own. On the other hand it also represents an interference along cultural lines, already discussed, namely, that the mind-body synthesis which is part of the Black cultural personality was conflicting with the mind-body dichotomy that is part of the white mainstream cultural personality. By insisting on the inseparability of information and feeling the Blacks were asserting their cultural norms over those of the dominant white middle-class group which, not only separates information from attitude, but from responsibility as to how this information might be used, a nice mentalistic, but unrealistic, distinction between Anthropology, Social Work and Politics. One is almost tempted to argue that for social scientists the abstraction is the reality beyond which no other reality exists.

PART V

Integration/Separation

Woo/Shoo Assumption

Much of the hoped for social integration of Blacks and whites on college campuses has not materialized much to the chagrin of those editorializing, or in some other way commenting, on it. The failure of integration in this context is generally blamed on the Black students by the white students and white news reporters.

The reason that they are blamed is that whites operate on the woo/shoo assumption. Basically, the woo/shoo assumption states that it is the obligation of the minority group member to pursue integration into the majority group (woo), while it is the prerogative of the majority member to reject the advances of the minority group member (shoo!). Rejection generally implies, "You're not ready yet," which means "you're not enough like us to go unnoticed."

The separation has come about then on the one hand because Black students at colleges have stopped pursuing entrance into white social groups. There is an element of irony in that white students, whose parents typically voted against open housing, and busing, connived at discrimination in employment, which, among other things, was to make sure that Black men were kept away from white women, should be piqued that their prerogative of rejection has been taken away, and should complain, "How come you don't want to integrate any more?"

On the other hand separation of Black and white social groups has come about because of the equal failure of white students to pursue integration into Black social groups. Most white students and commentators on integration don't consider this aspect of it because it reverses the woo/shoo roles, where whites become the wooers and Blacks become the shooers.

More to the point however, is that social integration between Blacks and whites on college campuses has not occurred because in effect, the requirements for integration have changed from what they once were. Previously, when the woo/shoo dictum was operative, a Black student might attempt to get into a predominantly white

group, but the requirement for such entrance was essentially to become "white" in both speech and behavior. The white students for their part saw themselves as "liberal" in admitting someone of a different race into their group. If any cultural adjustment was necessary it was made by the Black student. Whites got credit from Blacks at that time simply by violating their own group norms against social mingling with Blacks. The cultural definition of Black-white interaction invariably had a white middle-class structure and moral character to it. No reverse cultural deference (white to Black) was required or shown.

Today's separation on the other hand is a cultural one, not a racial one. Said one way, Black students are insisting on behaving Black wherever they are and white students are just not ready for that. Said another way, Black students are redefining their self-image much faster than white students are redefining their image of Blacks. So white expectation of deference from Blacks is no longer forthcoming. This is interpreted by whites as hostility. Blacks also now resent and reject traditional white notions vis-a-vis Blacks of superiority and/or paternalism, the latter being perceived as fake liberalism. Each has therefore retired to his own cultural group where he can feel most comfortable.

PART VI

Cultural Diffusion

It may have become evident to the reader of this article as it has been evident to the writer of it, that the white mainstream cultural personality that I have described is more characteristic of the middle and older generation, the "establishment," but less characteristic of their sons and daughters. That is to say, that in certain significant respects segments of the younger middle-class generation are moving in the direction of Black cultural norms, having acquired, so to speak, in part, a "Black" cultural code. For example, like Blacks, they acknowledge the selective failure of promotional do in the areas of poverty, human relations, environmental control, etc. They essentially agree that such failure is due to lack of will and commitment, neglect or mismanagement, rather than inability to control variables. They are also insisting that credibility with oneself cannot be established simply with words but only after such utterances achieve a basis in reality. They are insisting that talk again be used traditionally: as means, operating within a perceptually defined time period, accompanied by pressure on those who are in an official position to make the words become a reality.

In an aesthetic respect, they are moving away from a visual-mental channel of communication, which, with psychedelia, they have already carried to the extreme, towards an oral-aural channel of communication based on the Black cultural model. The folk-rock festivals examplify this as well as an attempt to move toward a more integrated mind-motor ratio comparable to that held

by Blacks, extending essentially what whites began when they started to do the Twist, which, according to Eldridge Cleaver in Soul on Ice, was when they made their first attempt to recapture their bodies. An excellent example of this shift from visual to aural and mental to motor is in the different attitude toward what their parents regarded as the "pleasures" of reading, a maxim of the mainstream cultural aesthetic. This attitude is not shared by large segments of the young college generation because for them reading is perceived as individual passivity while "pleasure" is perceived in terms of collective activity.

This Black to white cultural flow has existed in one form or another over the centuries here although only the white to Black cultural flow has been generally acknowledged. Yet it is clear that the Black cultural model has been the source for the emerging cultural code of the younger white generation, the range of diffusion extending from Black idiom in such terms as: cool, bag, up tight, the Man, soul, right on! to the other more subtle aesthetic and communication forms discussed above. The process of cultural "incorporation" of the subordinate culture by the dominant one, so aptly termed by Anderson Thompson, though he would add, for the purpose of "regenerating a dying Occidental civilization," is clearly in evidence here. Insofar as the Black cultural aesthetic continues to have this impact it will move the white cultural aesthetic, in addition to the direction already mentioned, away from mind, form, word, composition, plan, detachment, and calculation, toward respectively: body, expression, deed, performance, improvization, feeling and spontaneity.

PART VII

Who Pays When Communication Fails?

As has been evident in all examples of cross-cultural communication discussed in this article, one group more than the other pays the social penalty when communications fails. The point to note is that invariably it has been the subordinate cultural groups in our society or its members: Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Indians, Mexican-Americans, etc., that have suffered when misunderstanding occurs. The reason for this is that the power to hurt has generally resided in the hands of the majority and has been and continues to be used with a destructive force on members of minority groups, materially, through the denial of equal employment opportunities, adequate housing, proper diet, etc. and psychologically, by not only denying the validity of these members "other" ways of talking and behaving but declaring them to be "pathological" as well.

What then is the solution for a better society? In a word, bi-culturalism, but not something to be achieved only by minority group members, which has been the case to date, but by majority group members who up to the present have seldom acquainted themselves with any culture other than their own but rather have consistently assumed, whether in this country or abroad, that the "American" way was the only "correct" way and must be followed not only by themselves but by others. It is this assumption more than anything else, that grates and irritates others, alternatively termed by them "cultural arrogance," "cultural supremacy," "white racism," "ugly Americanism." It is this assumption that is most strongly held, defended and promulgated in our white suburbs and by mainstream culturites in general, and represented by those members of the dominant culture most in need of reeducation.

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